

20 February 2024 at 7.00 pm

Council Chamber, Argyle Road, Sevenoaks

Published: 12.02.24



Council

Supplementary Agenda

	Pages
4. To receive any questions from members of the public under paragraph 17 of Part 2 (The Council and District Council Members) of the Constitution.	(Pages 1 - 2)
6a 12 Otford Road, Sevenoaks Business Park Develop Project (Minute reference marked to follow)	Replacement Page 21
6b Treasury Management Strategy 2024/25 (Minute reference marked to follow)	Replacement Page 41
6d Budget and Council Tax Setting 2024/25 (Minute reference marked to follow)	Replacement Page 119
9. To consider any questions by Members under paragraph 19.3 of Part 2 (The Council and District Council Members) of the Constitution, notice of which have been duly given.	(Pages 11 - 12)

If you wish to obtain further factual information on any of the agenda items listed above, please contact the named officer prior to the day of the meeting.

Should you need this agenda or any of the reports in a different format, or have any other queries concerning this agenda or the meeting please contact Democratic Services on 01732 227000 or democratic.services@sevenoaks.gov.uk.

This page is intentionally left blank

Item 4 - To receive any questions from members of the public under paragraph 17 of Part 2 (The Council and District Council Members) of the Constitution.

1. "I recognise the hard choices that you are having to make in the current financial climate. However, the Council's grant support for the Citizens Advice general advice service is critical in equipping, training, supporting and covering the expenses of a volunteer plus maintaining our two office locations.

For volunteers, the office is where we meet, access technology and work stations, and receive support from supervisors and colleagues that is essential for training and guidance. This is a vital part of the volunteering experience, without which our capacity and delivery would be severely damaged.

My question is whether Council Members understand the impact on its most vulnerable residents and Citizens Advice volunteers that will result from the substantial reduction proposed to the level of grant?"

Sue Caskey

2. "Do Members appreciate the depth of advice and assistance that is provided by Citizens Advice volunteers?"

Volunteers are required to train to a high level relating to each area of advice. For example, volunteers have extensive training on the full range of benefits and other support that may be available to clients.

In a case I was heavily involved with last year we helped a Sevenoaks resident through numerous interactions over a 6-month period through two stages of appeal on a PIP claim. This resulted in a backdated payment of over £6,000 and an ongoing award of nearly £5,000 p.a.

We provide essential advice and practical help not otherwise available to clients – not just sign posting - often representing those with a range of educational, medical, social or age-related challenges."

Anthony Judge

3. "The presence Citizen's Advice maintains in both Swanley and Sevenoaks is critical for service delivery. For residents and those with greatest needs our local offices provide a place for appointments, reviewing and scanning their documents, and help with online applications. For volunteers, it is where we access technology, work stations and the support that trains, supports, mentors and guides us. This is a critical part of the volunteering experience and service delivery, without which our capacity and delivery would be severely impaired. Do Members appreciate the impact of the proposed grant

Agenda Item 4

cut will have on a service which has been calculated to delivery more than £9 in hard benefit secured for residents for every £1 of support invested?”

Kevin O'Brien-Wheeler

Item 6 (a) – 12 Otford Road, Sevenoaks Business Park Development Project

The attached report was considered by the Cabinet, and the relevant minute extract is below:

12 Otford Road, Sevenoaks Business Park Development Project (Cabinet – 8 February 2024, Minute 83)

The Leader and Portfolio Holder for Improvement & Innovation presented the report which set out the development opportunity to enliven an underutilised Council site in one of the main commercial areas in the district for the benefit of businesses, residents and visitors. The main purpose was regeneration and to support economic development which was a key policy objective for the Council. The funding proposal was to use Public Works Loan Board linked to the schemes viability to meet the terms of the loan.

She further advised that the proposal was to build and hold in the long term, rather than to sell on completion. However, the exit strategy could change depending on the needs of the Council and market conditions which could be decided nearer to completion of the development. The development proposal was subject to planning and continued financial viability as the scheme was developed through the usual design stages, pre and post planning application stage. She also noted that Members had separately highlighted that the proposed development site was partially located in a flood risk area, and that appropriate risk mitigation strategies would be considered as part of the detailed design process.

The Finance and Investment Advisory Committee had thoroughly considered the report and it was well debated before supporting the recommendation to Cabinet. It was also brought to Members attention that Officers were aware of the LCWIP and it would be considered in the planning stage of the project. Other comments were made regarding pathways and the proposed site had been earmarked for economic development and an employment site.

The Property Investment & Development Surveyor further advised that the proposed project was for a mixed use scheme consisting of industrial units and a drive-through. Subject to receiving the necessary approval, a project team to prepare detailed designs and submit a planning application would be appointed. The current programme envisaged a planning submission in September 2024 with a determination in December 2024 and a start on site in spring 2025 with completion in summer 2026.

Detailed design work would allow further derisking of the project and once a final design was achieved, and would address the cycle highway, further financial appraisals would be undertaken to ensure the scheme remains viable.

Agenda Item 6a

Members considered the report and expressed support for a site which was waiting to be developed. The Chairman used her discretion and allowed the local Member to address the meeting, who raised concern regarding the residents who lived in close proximity. The Property Investment & Development Surveyor advised that residents would be consulted before submission of the planning application, and consultation of hours of use would take place with the planning authority.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Members noted that consideration had been given to impacts under the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Resolved: That

- (a) it be recommended to Council that the capital funding of the Otford Road development scheme as outlined at Appendix B (Project Costs & Funding) be approved; and
- (b) the scheme would only progress subject to financial viability and planning consent being received, be noted.
- (c) subject to approval of the recommendation by Council at (a) above, provision of the project cost estimated at £3,635,004 is made within the Capital Programme; and
- (d) subject to approval of the recommendation (a) by Council, the Strategic Head of Property and Commercial, following consultation with the Head of Legal & Democratic Services and the Chief Officer Finance and Trading, be delegated authority to enter into necessary professional appointments/contracts to deliver the scheme.

Item 6 (b) – Treasury Management Strategy 2024/25

The attached report was considered by the Cabinet, and the relevant minute extract is below:

Treasury Management Strategy 2024/25 (Cabinet – 8 February 2024, Minute 84)

The Portfolio Holder for Finance & Investment presented the report which set out the proposed Treasury Management Strategy for 2024/25, as required by the Local Government Act 2003. The Strategy set out the Council's policy for borrowing and managing its investments. The Finance & Investment Advisory Committee had considered the same report and training received from Link the Treasury advisors, in advance of the meeting had assisted in the discussions. Comments made by the Committee requested further clarification regarding the Council's exposure to unrated organisations, and for it to be noted that the Council would be borrowing significantly more than it had in the past, and this could require diligent handling. As a result of the discussions there had been an update to the table at paragraph 79 to clarify the information relating to counterparties.

The Senior Principal Accountant outlined that in making borrowing and investment decisions the Council must have regard to the Prudential Code and the prudential indicators that it sets. The first part of the treasury management report proposes various prudential indicators and a minimum revenue provision policy to ensure that any capital expenditure plans were affordable. The report also detailed the borrowing and repayment strategy, and the investment strategy for 2024/25. There were no major changes to the investment strategy.

Members considered the report.

Resolved: That

- a) that the comments of the Finance & Investment Advisory Committee be noted; and
- b) it be recommended to Council that the Treasury Management Strategy for 2024/25 be approved.

This page is intentionally left blank

Item 6 (d) – Budget & Council Tax Setting 2024/25

The attached report was considered by the Cabinet, and the relevant minute extract is below:

Budget & Council Tax Setting 2024/25 (Cabinet – 8 February 2024, Minute 85)

The Portfolio Holder for Finance & Investment presented the report which set out the proposed budget for 2024/25. This was the final stage of the budget process which had given members an event greater opportunity to be involved in the processes than in previous years.

If approved, the net expenditure budget for 2024/25 would be £19.4m with the District's Council Tax increasing by 2.97% resulting in Band D Council Tax being £243.72, an increase of £7.02. He stressed again, the importance of recognising that the budget process had been the toughest for many years, and the list of savings reflected some of the difficult decisions that have had to be made.

He was pleased to say that those decisions and the approach adopted once again left the Council with a fully funded budget over the next 10 years that other councils would aspire to.

The Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Officer - Finance & Trading further detailed to Members that it had been an extremely challenging budget process with a number of changes made at each stage, and these were listed in Appendix E.

He went on to advise that the Financial Prospects report presented in September reported an annual budget gap of £1.3m. Members were fully involved during the Advisory Committee stage of the process where discussions on savings and growth proposals were put forward and produced further suggestions. Meanwhile, managers were continuing to search for possible savings recognising the challenges they may cause for their services.

This resulted in the gap being reported to Cabinet in December reducing to £656,000. Chief Officers then liaised with Portfolio Holders to come up with further ideas and managers searched once again. Also, greater risks were included in the assumptions particularly regarding Business Rates. These changes resulted in Cabinet being able to support a balanced annual budget position at their meeting in January. He reiterated again, that difficult decisions have had to be taken to enable the balanced budget.

Agenda Item 6d

The Final Local Government Finance Settlement was announced earlier this week and the council would receive an additional £165,000 for 2024/25 only. Cabinet would therefore have to make an additional recommendation as to how they proposed to use that funding.

An additional part of the budget process this year had been a thorough review of fees and charges, as listed in Appendix J and Cabinet were requested to approve the fees and charges for 2024/25. Members were advised that appendices P to S were not included within the Cabinet papers but would be included in the Council version of the report after the other preceptors had set their Council Tax.

The report included his opinion, as the Statutory Finance Officer, on the robustness of the budget estimates and adequacy of reserves.

Members discussed the report, noting the budget process had started earlier this year, with additional training and consultation with the Advisory Committees and Portfolio Holders.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Members note that consideration had been given to impacts under the Public Sector Equality Duty

Resolved: That

- (a) it be recommended to Council that:
 - i. the Summary of Council Expenditure and Council Tax for 2024/25 set out in Appendix F, be approved.
 - ii. the 10-year budget 2024/25 to 2033/34 which was the guiding framework for the detailed approval of future years' budgets set out in Appendix C(i) to the report, including the budget changes set out in Appendix E to the report, and that where possible any variations during and between years be met from the Budget Stabilisation Reserve, be agreed;
 - iii. the Capital Programme 2024/27 and funding method set out in Appendix K(i) and Capital Strategy 2024/25 set out in Appendix K(iii), be approved;
 - iv. the changes to reserves and provisions set out in Appendix L, be approved;

- v. the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2023/24, be rolled forward to 2024/25, with effect from 1 April 2024 (Appendix N), be approved;
 - vi. the agreement made at Council on 21 February 2023 to shorten the Council Tax premium on long term empty dwellings from the current 2 years (empty) to 1 year from 1 April 2024, be confirmed; and
 - vii. the agreement made at Council on 21 February 2023 to implement the 100% Council Tax premium on all second homes from 1 April 2025, be confirmed.
- (b) the fees and charges for 2024/25 as set out in Appendix J, be approved; and
- (c) the additional one-off funding of £165,000 in 2024/25 be placed into the Budget Stabilisation Reserve to reduce the savings required to offset the expected 2023/24 overspend when setting the 2025/26 budget.

This page is intentionally left blank

Item 9 – To consider any questions by Members under paragraph 19.3 of Part 2 (The Council and District Council Members) of the Constitution, notice of which have been duly given.

“Before we commit ourselves to borrowing £3. 635 million we need to know:

Have any cafes / drive throughs committed to take a lease or just shown an interest?

Direct Services equipment. 4 trucks and a great mass of wheely bins, bottle banks and other associated material stored here. Where is this to go if Dunbrik depot is full and no room at Hollybush lock up depot?

Is the contingency percentage (as specified in the Gold pages) sufficient, bearing in mind the increased costs due to unforeseen circumstances at Farmstead Drive and White Oak Leisure centre?

Is this the time to take out more loans bearing in mind the current financial situation with many local councils with over investment. What assurances can be given that we are not going down the same path?”

Cllr Purves
Sevenoaks Eastern

This page is intentionally left blank